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Fairbury Blade newspaper

Hospital is History of Community Spirit

The history of the Fairbury hospital is 41 years old. Through these two-score and one years the institution has grown from the unassuming beginning as a two-room nursing home to the realized dream of a completely modern structure built expressly as a hospital.

The story of the Fairbury hospital is also the story of the community which it serves, for it has been because of the indefatigable and tireless efforts of the community that the dream will soon be a reality.

The roots of the Fairbury hospital were sunk into the ground one day in 1911 when a Mrs. Vetters opened a nursing home above the building now occupied by the Fairbury Bakery. Steam baths and other treatments were a part of this early beginning. Miss Rachel Olsen assisted Mrs. Vetters.

The need for a larger and more well-equipped structure was keenly felt by many, however one of whom was the late Dr. J. H. Langstaff. Through the efforts of Dr. Langstaff, Dr. Rayburn and others of the city, a site for the new hospital was chosen, it being the cement block residence structure of John Monroe, located at 313 W. Oak street.

And it was then that the hospital truly became a community project, a classification which has remained to this date. Local carpenters donated labor and tools and began remodeling of the inside. Local decorators painted walls, refinished woodwork and polished floors, donating time and labor. Material was given by local merchants.

Operating room furnishings and equipment were donated by Dr. Langstaff. Ten persons gave $100 each as a foundation to establish the hospital. The B.Y.P.U. of the Baptist church gave silverware and kitchen utensils. The Ladies' Society of the Presbyterian church donated sets of china dishes, rugs and quilts. The Ladies' Aid of the Christian church offered sewing and comfort.

The Feb. 6, 1914 issue of the Blade effectively chronicled the interest of the community by continuing the list of donations.

Kring Bros., gave flowers for the opening, Mrs. G. Y. McDowell gave a dining room table and chairs, Mrs. George Decker a quilt, Mrs. Isaac Walton, mattress, pillows and bed clothes, Miss Lizziel Anker, a rug, Mrs. Will Goslin contributed sewing, Mr. and Mrs. Will Schmidt, parlor curtains, Miss Acca Stafford, tea towels, Charles Day, furnace repairs and plumbing. Alex Milne, flowers, Mrs. Martha Powell, a carpet, and many more.

Donating time and labor were A. Cooleney, Grover Troehler, Bert Slaughter, W. Amsbary, E. Woodard, M. G. Sterling, Drennen Bros., Thomas Slocombe, W. J. Langabeer, Ben Demler, Lon Hill, Fred Lough, The Blade, and Local Record, Rolland Woods, Mrs. Hartley, Peter Peebles, S. C. Cox, Henry Watts, J. K. Shook. Model Grocery, and on and on with almost an endless list.

On Feb. 2, 1914, the new hospital was formally opened to the public by a reception held during the afternoon and evening. A great number of residents availed themselves of the opportunity to visit the new hospital.

Miss Olsen was employed as superintendent.

This site continued to serve the needs of the community and surrounding area until 1928, when once again steps were taken to expand the facilities to their necessary level. On January 29, 1928, the hospital board, bidding at public auction, purchased the estate of Freida Munz Scharlach, the home built by John J. Taylor on South Fifth Street. The amount paid was $6,155.

It is significant that in purchasing the property, the hospital board pointed out that "sooner or later this city will have to have a new hospital building, and the property purchased is by far the most logical site in the city. When the time comes for the erection of a new hospital, the house now on the place will be torn down."

Again the public came to the front in preparing the rambling home as a hospital. With much labor, time and materials again donated, an addition was built to the structure and equipped as an operating room. Partitions were taken out and added rooms furnished by donations, the outside painted, and an oil heater installed, to name a few of the renovations. The American Legion donated considerable aid.

And once again, 19 months later, local residents stood back to admire their work, and on Saturday, August 17, 1929, the doors were thrown wide for open house. Ten beds, a large kitchen, nursery, dumbwaiter, elevator, reception office, nurse's room, expanded closet and storage space and other refinements made the community glow at its accomplishment.

The next step on the road toward Fairbury's dream of a completely equipped and modern hospital plant came on October 1, 1941, when ground was broken for a new obstetrical unit. By now many new faces were among the group taking active part in the planning, building and financing of the newest expansion but the same spirit of community helpfulness prevailed to see the job through.

A completely modern nursery, delivery room, and 11 additional beds on the first floor, a modern kitchen, and doctors' lounge and showers, a nurses' lounge, a fruit and vegetable storage room, kitchen, laundry and a new heating system for both the addition and main unit were prize refinements of the new wing.

Months stretched into a year, then to a year and a half, but on February 13, 1943, the obstetrical unit was opened for public inspection, and 11 days later was put into service. The first portion of the new hospital, prophesied 14 years earlier, was complete.

Supervising the project had been members of the hospital board, Dr. W. A. Marshall, president; Dr. F. H. Miller, vice president; Miss May Bennett, secretary; C. R. Voris, treasurer; J. N. Bach, Mrs. Kate Huntoon, Dr. Lockner, of Chatsworth; Dr. Shaddle, of Forrest; Dr. Branch, of Piper City; Dr. J. H. Langstaff, Mrs. M. A. Anderson, Mrs. Orville Lange, Mrs. Walter Burt, Mrs. Jessie Powell, Mrs. Edward Carlson and M. D. Fugate.

Members of the building committee at that time were M. D. Fugate, chairman; Mayor Klopfenstein, Dr. Miller, C. R. Voris and Edward Lange.

On August 9, 1950, phase two of the three phases of creating a modern hospital on the site of the old Taylor homestead was begun. On that day excavation for the second wing was started. Again as on past occasions, donated labor, materials, time and money and various benefits proved important factors in the completion of the wing, which, in reality, will serve as the main hospital until phase three, the final

phase, can be realized.

The second wing is now completed, and possibly within the next week will be thrown open to the public for inspection, just as the preceding changes have been.

Officials in charge at this time were: Board Members: John Gerber, pres., Roy Taylor, V. Pres., Hazel Metz, Sec., Hartzell Munz, Treas., Sue Lange, Emma Burt, Dr. C. G. Shaddle, C. B. Day, Salome Schlipf, Lloyd Borngasser, Mrs. Charles Ambrose, Mrs. Margaretha Myer, Clifford Denker, Harry Bach, William Arends. Administrator, Mrs. Dorothy Clark, Superintendent of Nurses.

Building Committee: Lloyd Borngasser, Chairman, Roy Taylor, V. Chairman, Louis Heins, Treas., John Sutter, John Roth, Kenneth Rosenboom, of Chatsworth, Archie Underwood, of Piper City, William Metz, of Forrest, and Roger Lindenbaum, also of Forrest.

Phase three is slated to begin within a month. It is the tearing down of the present main hospital building, a maneuver foretold in 1929, and at last realized. More months of planning, working, building and waiting are in store before a new section will rise in its place, but it will surely come to pass, and a dream dreamed in 1911 will have been transferred into reality.

If there is a lesson to be learned from following the growth of the Fairbury hospital, it would seem to be this. The hospital has grown from a two-room upstairs nursing home to the prominent structure it is today by being nurtured on the spirit of a community. Planted by one generation the idea has been cultivated by the stronger hands of another generation, and both may yet see it blossom and receive the fruits that its being bears.

The Fairbury hospital has risen not from government subsidies, federal loans or from currying the favor of those eager to bestow “something for nothing.”

It has taken time, and is still not completed, but the building of the Fairbury hospital should make citizens of Fairbury proud for a long time to come.